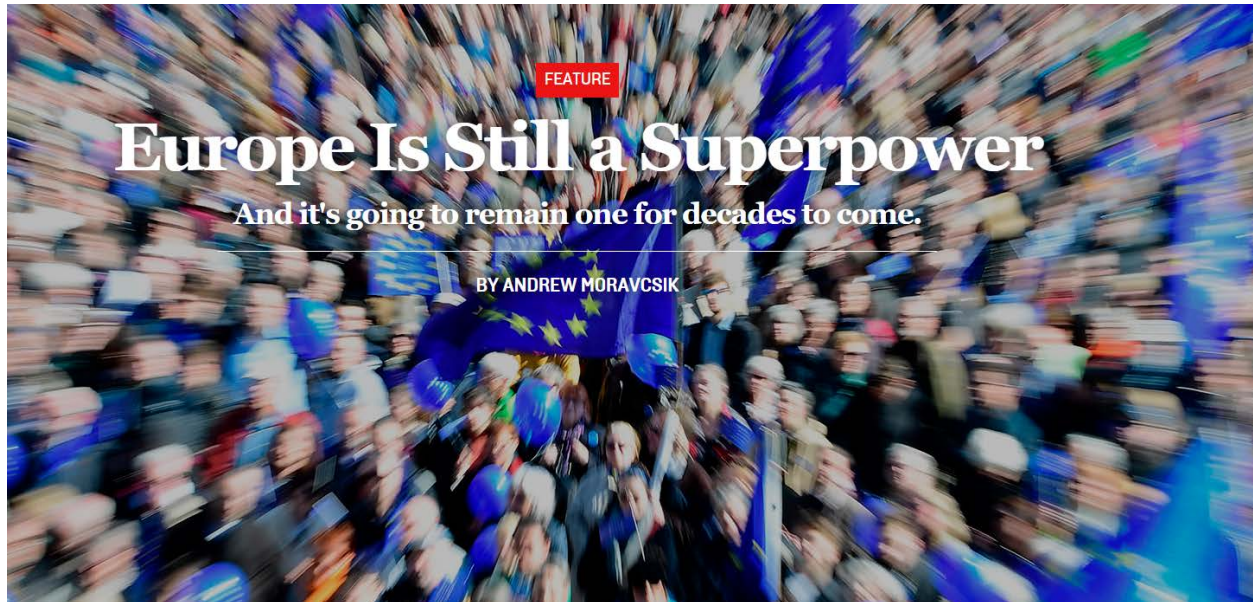




FOREIGN POLICY MAGAZINE (APRIL 13, 2017)



Sixty years after the Treaty of Rome, many view Europe as a spent force in global politics. Conventional wisdom states that world politics today is unipolar, with the United States as the sole superpower. Or perhaps it is multipolar, with China, India, and the rest rising to challenge Western powers. Either way, Europe's role is secondary — and declining. The European Union, it is said, is too weak to avoid withering away in the face of Russian subversion, mass migration, right-wing revolt, British plans to leave, slow growth, and anemic defense spending.

Of course, it's easy to spot signs of disarray. Modern Europe is messy, and its institutions and policies are imperfect. Some of the threats facing the EU are real: slow growth and austerity, for instance, within the eurozone. Others, like rising right-wing nationalism and migration, are less so, for reasons I will discuss at the conclusion.

Yet amid all the hyperbole and hysteria, a basic point gets missed. Europe today is a genuine superpower and will likely remain one for decades to come. By most objective measures, it either rivals or surpasses the United States and China in its ability to project a full spectrum of global military, economic, and soft power. Europe consistently deploys military troops within and beyond its immediate neighborhood. It manipulates economic power with a skill and success unmatched by any other country or region. And its ability to employ “soft power” to persuade other countries to change their behavior is unique.

If a superpower is a political entity that can consistently project military, economic, and soft power transcontinentally with a reasonable chance of success, Europe surely qualifies. Its power, moreover, is likely to remain entrenched for at least another generation, regardless of the outcome of current European crises. In sum, Europe is the “invisible superpower” in contemporary world politics. Here’s why.

Why Europe should be viewed as a single actor

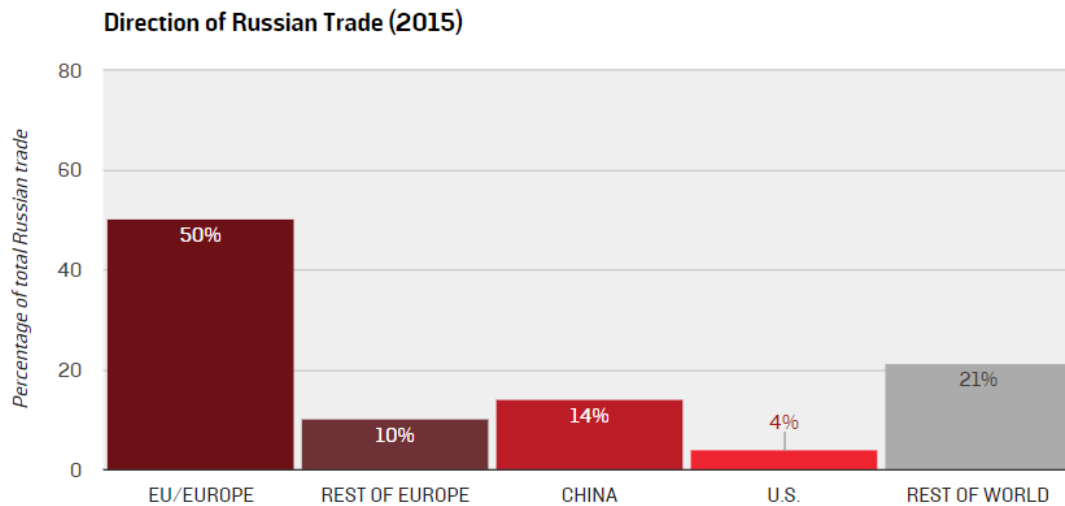


Flags of EU member states hang inside the Council of the European Union's Lex building on Feb. 18, 2016 in Brussels. (Photo credit: DAN KITWOOD/Getty Images)

Before turning to Europe’s specific military, economic, and soft power assets, let’s dismiss the nearly universal belief that Europe is too decentralized to act as a superpower. Europe is not a sovereign state. Yet in practice, it generally acts as a single force in world politics.

We ignore European unity at our peril. Most observers analyze Europe as 28 separate countries — even though doing so generates geopolitical nonsense. To see why, consider one recent example: Russia’s foreign-policy options after its invasion of Ukraine triggered Western sanctions. Many predicted that China’s rising economic weight meant the Kremlin would surely turn to Beijing. In July 2015, leading newspapers across Eurasia ran the same story (originally from *Agence France-Presse*) reporting that “China has emerged as Russia’s largest trading partner as Moscow turns east, seeking markets in Asia in the face of Western sanctions.”

Yet Russian President Vladimir Putin quickly discovered the futility of a Russian pivot to Asia. While the premise is, strictly speaking, true — China *is* Russia’s top trading partner — it accounts for only 14 percent of Russia’s trade. Just three European countries combined — Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands — account for more than 20 percent, and Europe as a whole for over half. No realistic increase in trade with China could offset European dominance.



Source: Eurostat/IMF/World Bank

Treating Europe as disunited was geopolitically naive. Even though EU law imposes no legal obligation to implement sanctions, Europe acted — and paid more than 90 percent of the costs of the Western policy response to Russia. European power and unity are the glue that has held together this Western policy for the past two years.

This is only one example of how, despite its fragmentation, Europe effectively projects power in those areas that count most for global influence. Certainly, European governments often disagree among themselves, sometimes vociferously and in public. Yet policy coordination, both formal and informal, permits European governments to act as a unit to influence the outside world. Three modes of European coordination are critical: common EU policies, coordination, and tacit policy convergence.

First, EU member states often share a formal mandate to cooperate. Governments are generally obligated legally to act together in the name of the European Union on trade, regulatory, environmental, monetary, neighborhood policy, development, EU enlargement, the free movement of people, and border controls. When serious disagreements arise, countries often resolve them through constructive abstention, in which some governments set aside their own concerns and permit the EU to exercise its collective power in areas of greatest importance to others.

Second, even when EU law does not formally mandate uniformity, European governments often form “coalitions of the willing.” After 60 years, Europe has entrenched a continental network of informal norms, procedures, and institutions that quietly encourage policy coordination. European foreign and defense policies illustrate how this system of voluntary solidarity works. Member states take foreign-policy positions in common, which can be implemented by the EU high representative and common diplomatic service, or by coalitions of national governments acting on their own. EU governments coordinate national positions in international organizations, including the United Nations. Not all governments need to participate for these actions to be successful. Again, constructive abstention permits governments to signal disagreement in principle with decisions that nonetheless go forward in practice — as occurred, for example, in recent decisions involving

the former Yugoslavia and Libya, or recent efforts to dampen migration across the Mediterranean.

Yet, in one form or another, European governments have launched dozens of joint military operations since the end of the Cold War.

This coordination extends to collective European military operations. While no formal mandate exists, missions often lack a formal EU imprimatur and involvement limited to those who wish to participate. Yet, in one form or another, European governments have launched dozens of joint military operations since the end of the Cold War. Impasses like the 2003 Iraq War, when European governments so strongly disagree that they pursue opposing policies on a prominent global issue, are extremely rare.

Third, even when the EU neither mandates nor coordinates a policy response, the convergent national laws, strategies, and interests of European states more often than not generate compatible and mutually reinforcing policies. European governments have overlapping international institutional memberships and legal obligations. Almost all are NATO members, which means they conduct common planning and training and accept collective defense obligations. They adhere to the same treaties governing asylum, human rights, the environment, development, and many forms of U.N. cooperation. All are friendly with the United States. They share national embassies. In the soft-power realm, the ability of Europeans to educate foreign students, set global constitutional norms, and garner a worldwide following for athletic achievements contribute to a common European influence in the world — even if the EU explicitly coordinates little of it.

At a more fundamental level, all European countries are democratic and economically interdependent, and they share largely uncontested (indeed, often invisible) borders. Hence they coexist without posing any mortal threat to one another. With the highly unlikely exception of a Russian attack on NATO, they face no such immediate security threats from other great powers, either. This relatively benign environment affords Europeans the luxury of focusing their geopolitical influence on other, more distant matters. This differs strikingly from the situation of, say, China, which must prepare for potential military conflict with almost all of its regional neighbors — Korea, Japan, Taiwan, India, Russia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other South and Southeast Asian states, not to mention the United States — and keep its army in reserve to maintain domestic order.

For these reasons, we should recognize Europe as a single superpower in projecting military, economic, or soft power — whether or not it acts formally as one.

Europe's military might

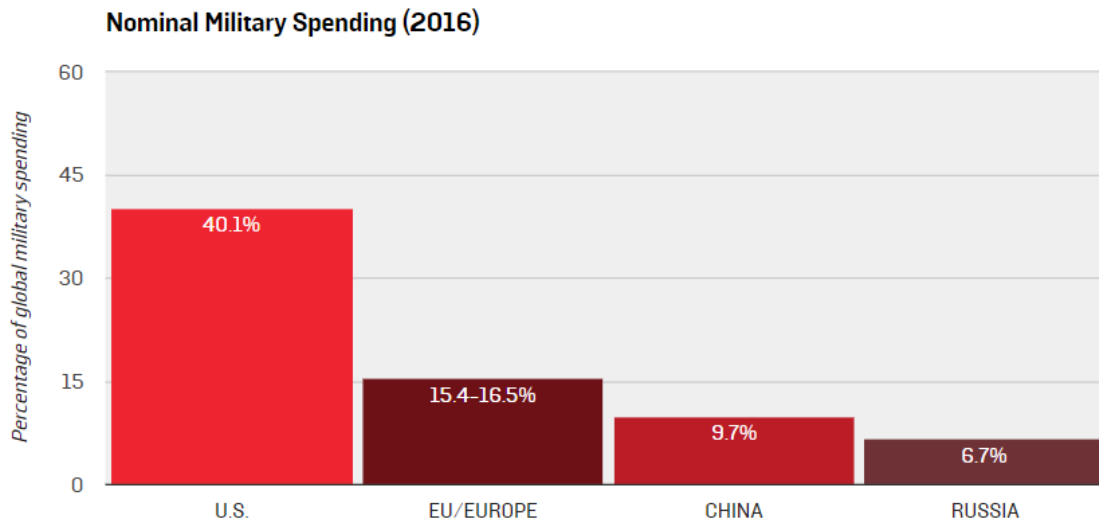


British soldiers are silhouetted against the sky as they provide security for a meeting with the Afghan National Police in Lashkar Gah on May 17, 2006. (Photo credit: JOHN D MCHUGH/AFP/Getty Images)

Let's begin with "hard" military power. While Europe's ability to project coercive force to compel others to acquiesce to political demands does not match that of the United States, it is more active and capable than any other global power. The oft-repeated phrase that "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus" is a great sound bite but a misleading policy analysis.

The conventional starting point for measuring military capability is the money each country spends on defense. On this score, the United States, which accounts for more than 40 percent of global military spending, heads the list. After that, most analysts list China, with the second-highest national spending and more than 2 million active duty soldiers, followed by Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, India, Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea.

Here again the failure to aggregate Europe clouds our geopolitical vision. If we unify European military activities, it comes in second. European military spending accounts for 15 to 16 percent of the global total. China runs third, with under 10 percent, and Russia spends less than 7 percent, less than half as much as Europe.



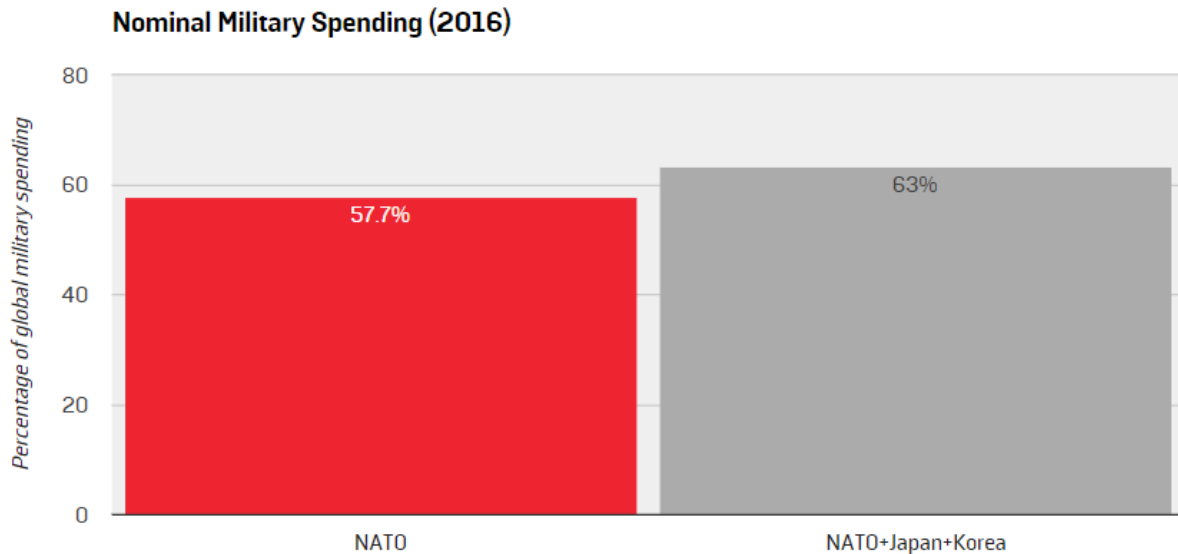
Source: The Military Balance 2017, IISS

At current growth rates, China's annual military spending (or perhaps that of other rising powers) will not surpass that of Europe for at least a few decades, and the United States for one or two generations — even on the optimistic assumption that Chinese growth continues.

To be sure, this isn't quite a one-to-one comparison, since Europe's militaries make their spending decisions separately. Some inefficiencies result when, say, France and Italy separately purchase and maintain their own aircraft carriers. Yet studies suggest that efficiency losses due to decentralized production and procurement — a problem that also bedevils the United States and China, with their domestic interservice rivalries and political pork-barreling — is much smaller than one might think. The most promising area for reform (consolidation of national defense industries) generates no more than 7 percent (about 14 billion euros) savings. This is real money, but too small a number to significantly alter Europe's relative international standing. Moreover, the "bang for the buck" of the weapons Europe procures remains competitive, as evidenced by the fact that it consistently ranks as the world's No. 1 arms exporter, outstripping even the United States and Russia.

Yet even Europe's advantage in annual defense spending understates the entrenched military advantages that it (like the United States) enjoys over any rising power. Usable military capability is not a simple function of defense spending in a given year, but investment in stocks of defense technology, materiel, training, and experience sustained over generations. The average age of equipment in the U.S. military varies from 10 to 25 years, and the life cycle of a fighter like the F-18, introduced just after the Vietnam War, will be nearly a century.

For China to challenge Europe or the United States on an equal basis, Beijing would need to outspend the West not for one year, but for decades — something that delays the projected point where (at current trends) it would surpass the West close to the end of the 21st century. All scenarios whereby China (or another rising power) advances more quickly require increases in military spending of at least 15 percent per year. That in turn means that China must either triple its economic growth rate (unlikely) or increase military spending tenfold as a percentage of the gross domestic product (a strategy that, Chinese leaders are well aware, bankrupted the Soviet Union).



Source: The Military Balance 2017, IISS

A final reason for Euro-optimism is that Europe maintains enduring alliances. The United States and Europe are irrevocably — yes, even in the age of President Donald Trump, as recent reassuring words to NATO partners by Vice President Mike Pence and cabinet officers demonstrate — allied with one another and with 28 other NATO countries. This bloc commands almost 60 percent of global military spending. Europe, like the United States, maintains security partnerships and bases across the globe, as well as close relations with dozens of countries around the world.

By contrast, Russia and China can call on few allies. Beijing offers modest military training and some assistance to Cambodia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Syria, and a few African countries; maintains a security partnership with Pakistan; and has only one ally: North Korea.

These advantages are not just theoretical. European militaries actually do more in the world than those of any country except the United States. Only Europe and the United States have deployed tens of thousands of combat troops outside of home countries almost continuously since the end of the Cold War. During the past decade, European deployments have averaged 107,000 soldiers per year on land, plus a considerable naval presence. By contrast, China has deployed almost no combat soldiers abroad, and India has done so only within U.N. missions. Recent Russian activities have been limited to brief forays in neighboring parts of the former Soviet Union and air and naval support for its sole remaining Middle Eastern ally.

They have participated in a vital way to U.S.-led missions, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In the latter, more than 25 percent of the fatalities suffered by Western forces were Europeans from 23 countries.

Europeans do not just participate; they lead. They have headed military operations in Macedonia, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Somalia, and Mali. They have led naval operations off the Horn of Africa and in the Mediterranean. They have conducted support or monitoring missions in Sudan, South Sudan, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Indonesia, Iraq, Moldova, Kosovo, Georgia, Niger, the Palestinian territories, Ukraine, and the Baltic States. They have led U.N. missions, including in Lebanon. They have participated in a vital way to U.S.-led missions, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In the latter, more than 25 percent of the fatalities suffered by Western forces were Europeans from 23 countries. The world, and the burden on the United States, would be quite different without all this European activity.

Despite their powerful military, many claim that Europeans could do more in the world if only their governments would spend more on defense — perhaps the 2 percent of the GDP that NATO leaders promised a few years ago. Yet little evidence suggests that more men and materiel — or greater centralization in EU institutions — would generate much more or better European military activity. While Europe did suffer the indignity of asking the United States to resupply it in Libya, it is difficult to see why, as many argue, the Europeans should develop more military capacity across the board. The need for resupply did not affect the outcome of Libya, and it is unlikely to do so elsewhere either, since the United States and Europe have agreed on every military intervention but one since the early 1990s. (The second Iraq War was a lonely exception.) One is hard-pressed to think of any recent case in which a significant group of European states (let alone a majority) desired to launch a strong military or diplomatic mission, but failed to do so for lack of military might.

Europe's preeminent economic clout



Workers assemble cars at the Volkswagen factory in Wolfsburg, Germany, on Feb. 25, 2011. (Photo credit: SEAN GALLUP/Getty Images)

Europe possesses impressive military assets, yet the main drivers of its global influence lie elsewhere. Europeans tend to be skeptical about using military force in wars of choice, and

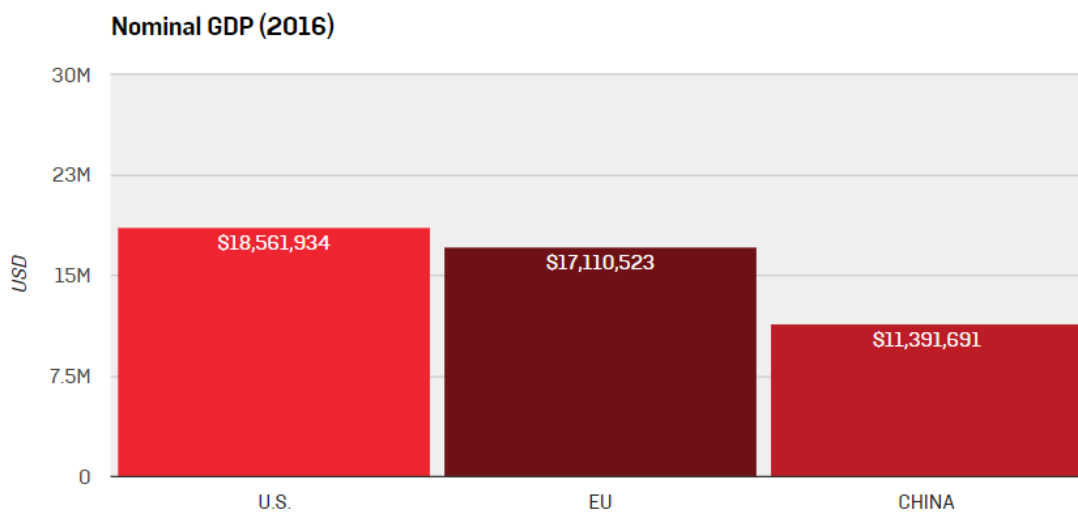
have therefore chosen to specialize in nonmilitary tools of statecraft. Their capacities here often exceed those of the United States.

Europe's comparative advantage in civilian power is as vital to global peace and security as U.S. military might. To be sure, a century ago military might was widely viewed as the most essential of global power resources. Yet today it is rarely decisive. It is simply too expensive and uncertain, relative to the potential gains. No direct conflict has occurred among "great powers" since the Korean War. Smaller wars are also steadily becoming both less common and less costly. When they get involved, great powers tend to lose more than they win. Syria is troubling, but it is an exception to a much larger trend away from interstate war.

Countries now typically find nonmilitary means to manage the most important global problems: not just territorial issues, but economic interdependence, development, environmental degradation, global health, human rights, migration, and even terrorism and crime. Among the most important nonmilitary capabilities is economic power. It is hard to see military power playing much of a role in dealing with most such problems. Though Europe maintains a robust military, it makes sense for it to specialize in a type of power that the United States cannot project.

One European specialty is economic power projection. To induce political concessions, European countries manipulate access to their markets, condition economic assistance and exchange, and exploit regulatory and institutional dominance. Thus, a basic source of European economic power is the raw size of its economy.

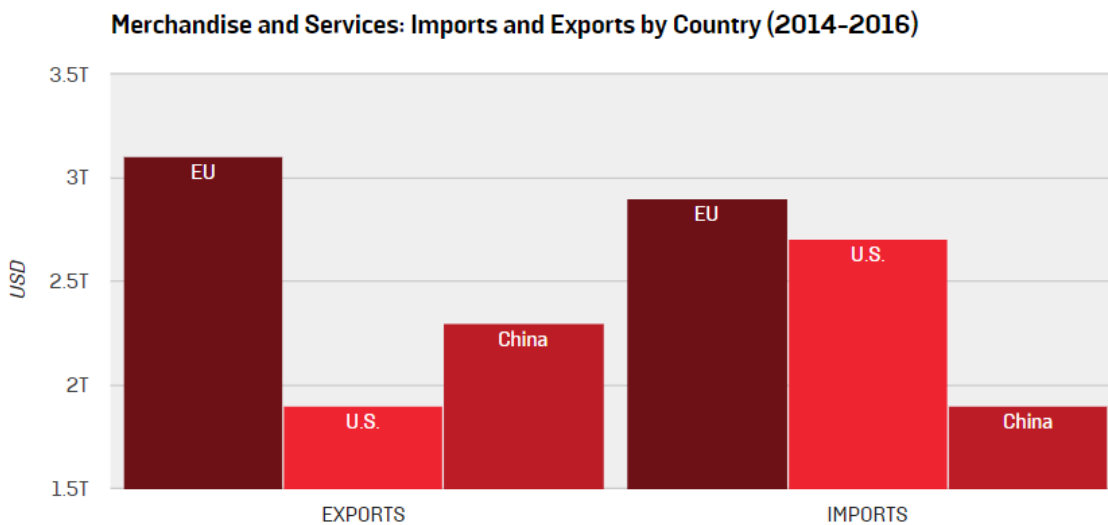
The conventional wisdom again misleads us. According to a recent poll of citizens in 40 countries, almost everyone in the world believes either that China is already the world's dominant economy, or that the United States still maintains primacy. Only 5 percent think of the EU as a "leading economic power." Yet those 5 percent have a point. By the simplest measure of economic power, nominal GDP, the EU is nearly the same size as the United States and 63 percent larger than China.



Source: World Economic Outlook database, International Monetary Fund

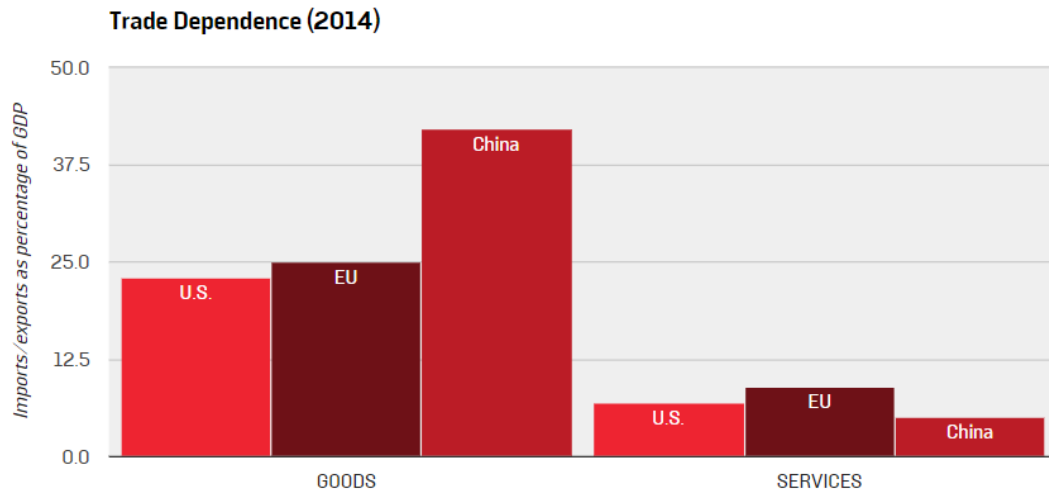
This may surprise those who have read widespread reports that China now has the world's largest GDP. Such analyses are deceptive because they employ "purchasing power parity" (PPP), a statistical measure developed by international development agencies to measure individual poverty and wealth in poorer economies where services and labor are cheap. PPP-based gross national product statistics deliberately inflate developing country income in ways that exaggerate the international value of exports and imports, high technology, modern weapons systems, foreign aid, and most other elements of international economic influence. The more appropriate standard for measuring a country's aggregate economic clout is its nominal GDP. By this measure, China will not surpass the EU or the United States for decades.

Recent newspaper headlines about the dominance of China and the United States are misleading because they, again, disaggregate Europe into 28 individual countries, rather than treating it as unified. The EU is, in fact, the world's second-largest economy. Even more importantly, it is the world's largest trader of goods and services.



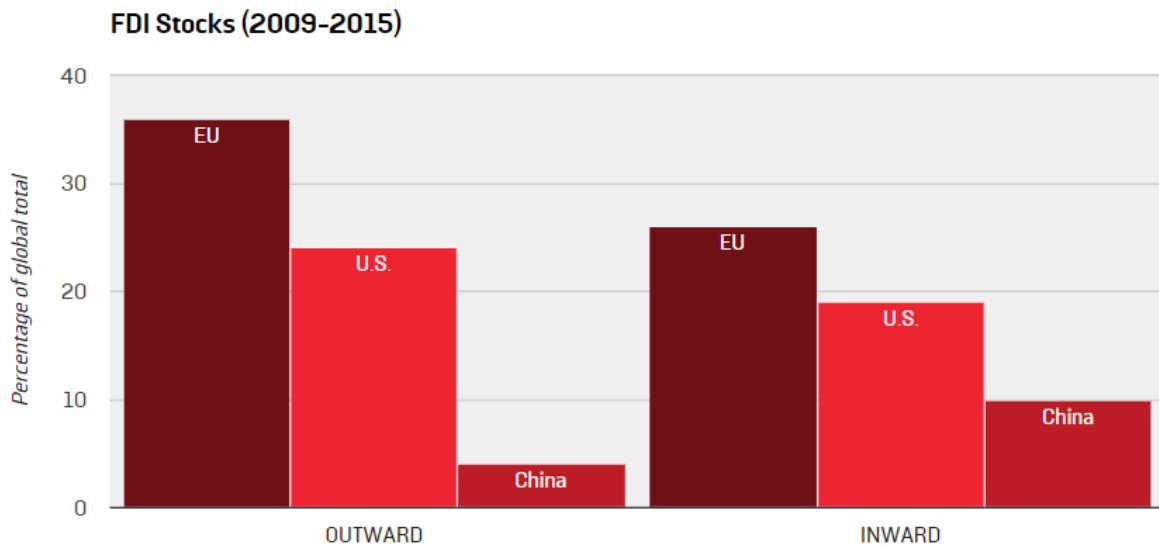
Source: International trade in services, Eurostat

Since exports can be a source of vulnerability as well as strength, a more focused measure of trade power is dependence on foreign markets. The more trade dependent a country is, the less powerful it is. Europe is slightly more trade dependent than the United States but far less than China.

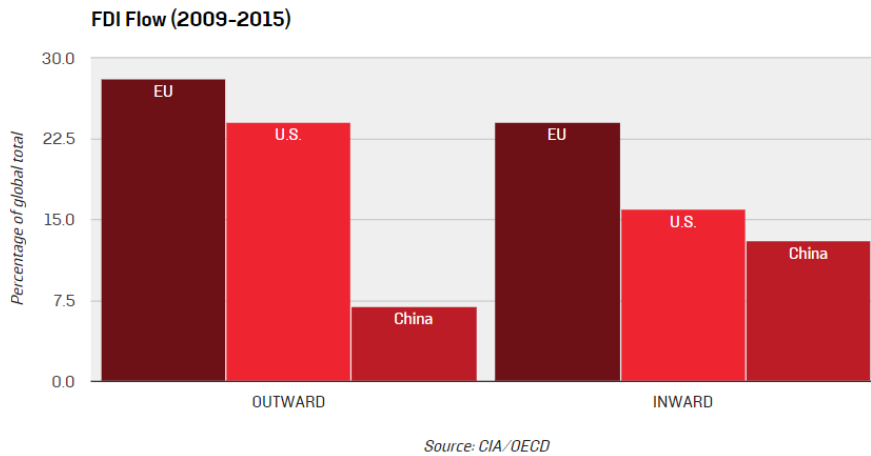


Source: Eurostat/IMF/World Bank

What about recent increases in Chinese foreign direct investment that have triggered so much media attention?

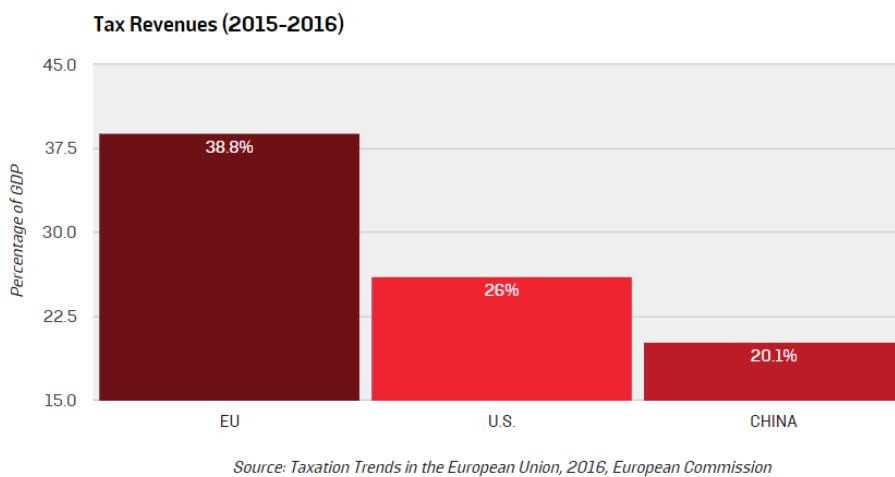


Source: CIA/OECD



To be sure, if you sell natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, or Australia, Chinese investment is a big deal. Otherwise, we should remember that most global investment still takes place among developed countries, where China's role remains modest.

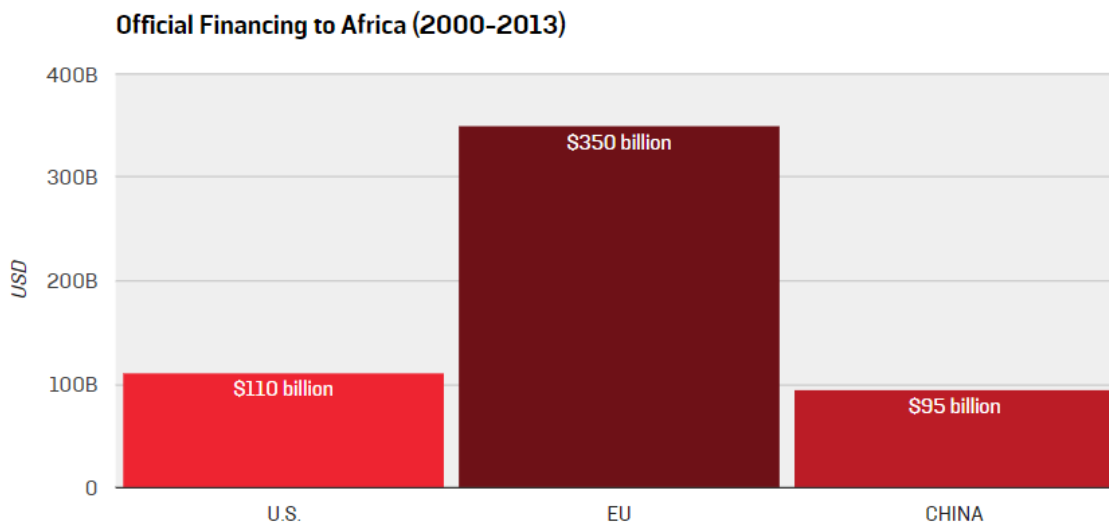
Yet even this underestimates Europe, because effective economic power depends not just on the relative size of its economy but on average *per capita* income. The poorer its citizens, the fewer resources governments can extract from them. In poorer countries, development is often the primary imperative, foreign-policy spending a luxury, and the overall level of autonomous technological sophistication low. While the aggregate income of China ranks in the top three, its *per capita* income ranks 74th (between Saint Lucia and Gabon). Azar Gat, an Israeli scholar, estimates that developed governments like those in Europe extract three or four times as much for foreign-policy purposes as the governments of developing countries like China. One example is the ability to tax. Revenue as a percentage of GDP is almost twice as high in the EU as in China.



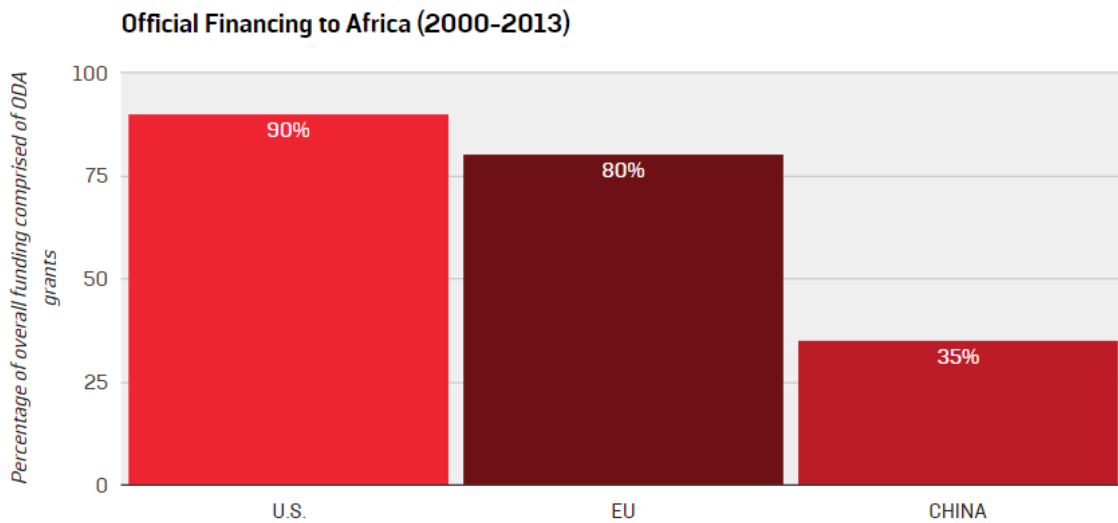
Europe does not hesitate to exploit its preeminent economic position. EU enlargement — driven largely by perceptions of economic advantage — has been in recent decades the most cost-effective political tool of influence in the hands of any Western country. Over 60 years, the EU has expanded from six to 28 members, encouraging countries to adopt democratic, legal, and market reforms along the way. Though enlargement is now more difficult politically, it continues in the western Balkans.

Europe further leverages its regional market power through a “neighborhood policy” of bilateral agreements with nearby countries from Morocco to Moldova. It supports the World Trade Organization and imposes conditionality on its preferential trade agreements. Inward visa-free travel and migration are important *quid pro quos* in negotiations with neighbors. To the chagrin of U.S. and Chinese companies, Europe dominates global regulation, forcing its trading partners to adopt relatively high European product standards — a phenomenon Columbia Law professor Anu Bradford calls a hegemonic “Brussels effect.”

Other European economic instruments are less visible but no less important. One example is foreign aid. Europe provides 69 percent of global official development assistance (ODA), compared with 21 percent for the United States and far less for China. Europe, like the United States, offers the bulk of its total aid in the form of grants, whereas China tends to provide not ODA but export credits and government loans — financial flows that must be repaid and are thus less valuable to recipients. Yet even if you include both, Europe’s financial presence dominates that of the United States and China.



Source: OECD/AidData/Taxation Trends in the European Union, 2016, European Commission



Source: OECD/AidData/Taxation Trends in the European Union, 2016, European Commission

European foreign aid has played a decisive role in promoting Western strategic objectives. For example, Europe's 10 billion to 15 billion euros of annual economic aid and the promise of freer trade and energy arrangements constitute 90 percent of Western aid and trade with Ukraine. Ukraine remains troubled, yet without Europe's economic commitment the government in Kiev would have surely gone bankrupt and fallen back into the Russian geopolitical sphere.

Another example of a uniquely effective instrument of European economic power is the imposition of economic sanctions. Ukraine again illustrates the point. As with aid and trade policies, 90 percent of the cost of recent Western sanctions against Russia falls on Europe. This reflects Europe's unique clout as the largest trading partner not just of many countries in the former Soviet Union, but nearly every country in the Middle East and Africa. It is hard to imagine sanctions working anywhere in the world without Europe's active participation. The United States, by contrast, hardly trades with most of these countries, and thus it lacks the capacity to levy effective sanctions on its own. For example, Washington sanctioned Tehran continuously for 35 years with little effect. After Europe signed on to tough sanctions in 2013, Iran agreed to a nuclear deal within two years.

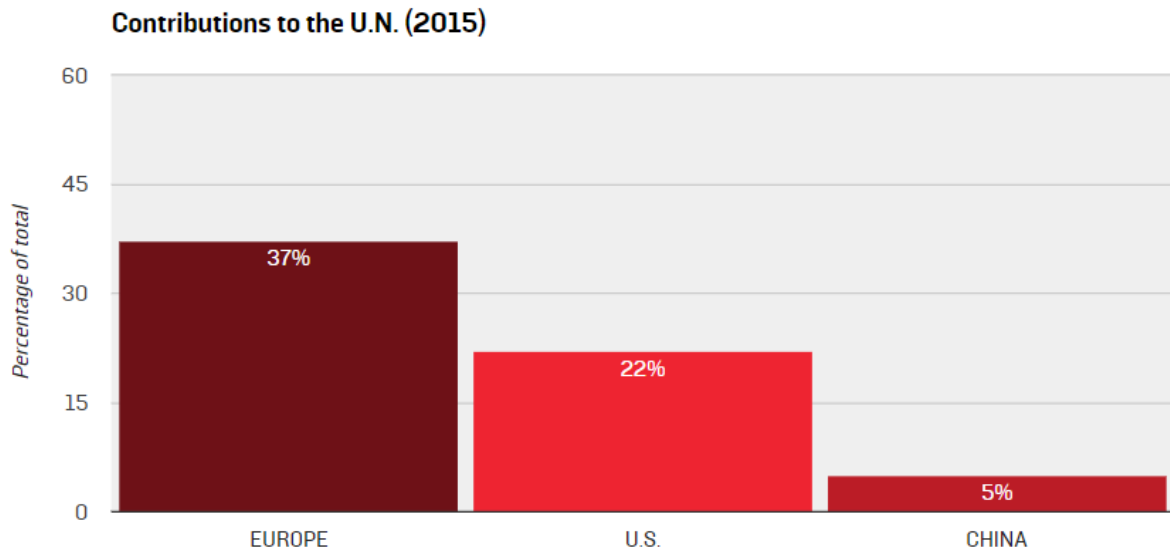
Europe's surprising soft power



Tourists snap a selfie in Gaudi's Park Guell in Barcelona, Spain, on July 11, 2014. (Photo credit: DAVID RAMOS/Getty Images)

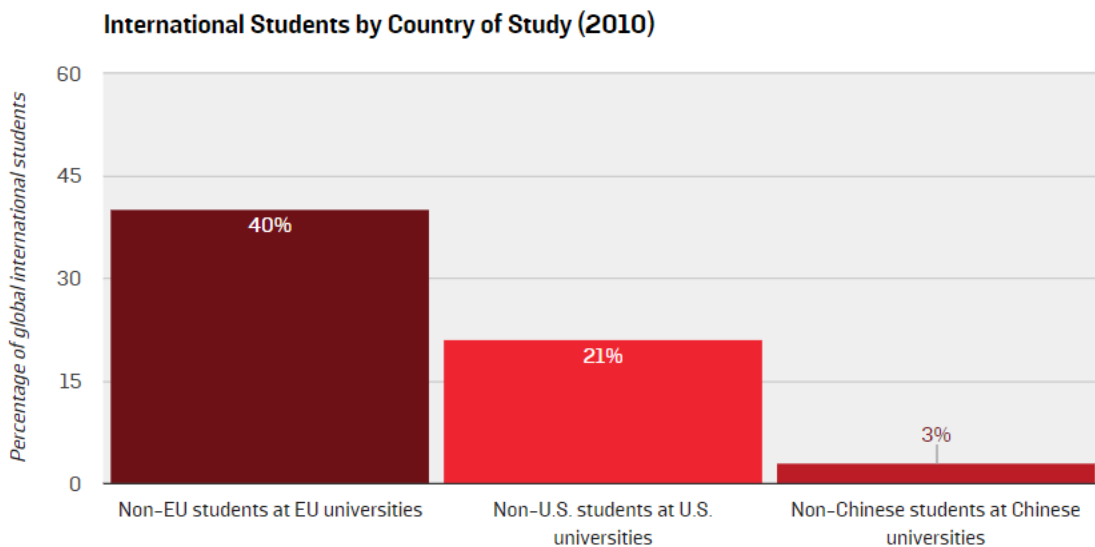
“Soft power” measures the ability to advance foreign-policy goals by disseminating and manipulating ideas, information, and institutions that help persuade other countries to act in particular ways. Soft power is employed by various means, and the EU belongs among the world's most effective manipulators of many of them.

One important type of soft power is the construction of multilateral institutions that are attractive to join. Today, Europeans are the world's leading supporters of global and regional institutions. Their commitment begins with the EU itself and its ring of agreements with regional neighbors, but Europe also has a decisive influence in managing economic interdependence, human rights, the environment, development, and health at a global level. Typical is the United Nations: Though the United States generally takes credit for being the largest contributor to the international body, once we aggregate Europe's contribution, it is far more influential. Without European pressure, institutions like the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization, and other global institutions would not exist in their current form. By imposing conditionality in exchange for membership or collectively rewarding compliance, other governments become committed to institutional rules Europe has designed, thereby influencing the policies of individual states.



Assessment of Member States' contributions to the United Nations regular budget for the year 2015, U.N.

Europe also employs subtler modes of exercising soft power. One is through education. Europe is one of the two educational superpowers. Twenty-seven of the world's top 100 universities are in Europe, compared with 55 in the United States, one in Russia, and none in China. Europe exceeds the United States in educating foreign students, hosting almost twice as many students from outside the EU as non-Americans at U.S. universities, and over 10 times more students than non-Chinese studying in China.



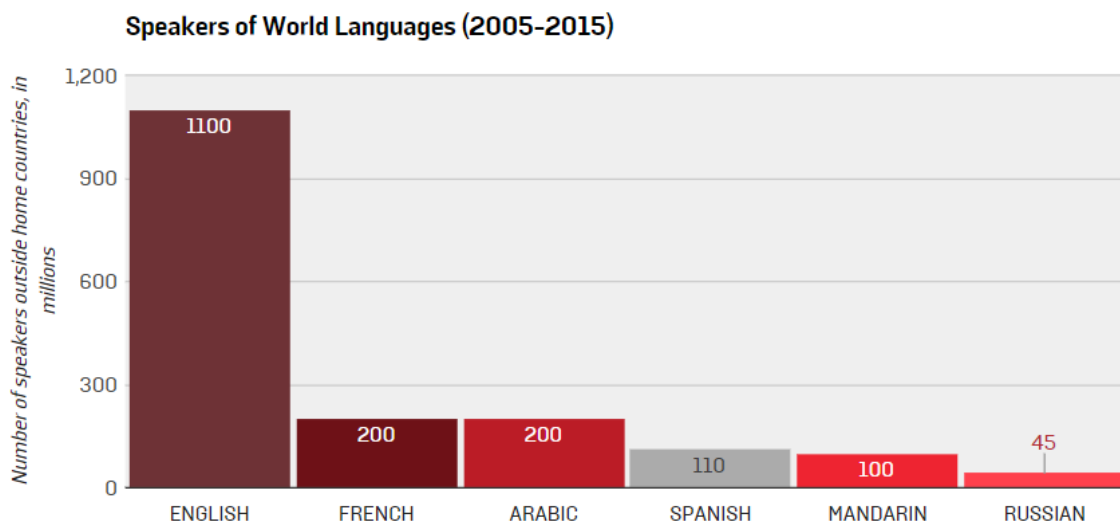
Source: Education at a Glance 2012, OECD

There are signs that opening up European institutions of higher learning to outsiders has been influential. For example, legal scholars have observed that the values and institutions found in most newly drafted national constitutions do not reflect American or Chinese practices, but distinctively European ones. These include social welfare rights,

internationally recognized human rights, parliamentary government, and restrictions on money in politics.

Beyond purely political values, Europe garners broad global admiration for its social, cultural, and lifestyle values. Among the top two dozen global tourist destinations, more than half are European. More profound is European dominance of almost all polls of global respect. Last year, for example, Forbes magazine asked 40,000 people worldwide which countries were the most “reputable”: a composite measure of happiness, cleanliness, lack of corruption, tolerance, and other qualities. Of the top 20 countries, 15 are European. By contrast, the United States ranks 28th and China 57th.

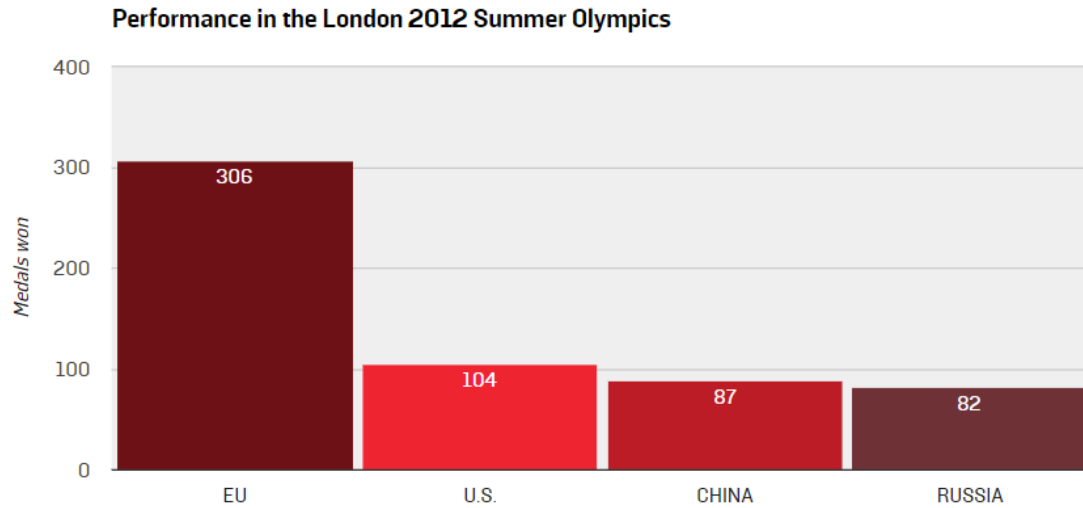
Language? Here too, Europeans enjoy enduring advantages, since the world’s second languages are mostly European. English, of course, is a dominant second language across the globe, while French and Spanish also play important roles. The languages of other great powers, notably Mandarin and Russian, have quite limited sway.



Source: Multiple sources, including author's primary research

Even in Southeast Asia, Chinese ranks low as a second language, outside of diaspora Chinese communities.

Pop culture? To be sure, the United States has one great advantage. Every one of the top 20 worldwide grossing films ever made came from Hollywood. Yet sports is a similar form of popular mass entertainment with comparable global cachet — and Europe is the world’s dominant sports superpower. Five of the top seven most-watched professional sports in the world — soccer, basketball, cricket, field hockey, table tennis, tennis, and volleyball — are played at the most prominent and intensive professional level in Europe rather than in the United States or China. The most prestigious European professional soccer generates more income and enjoys more worldwide visibility than any other sports franchises anywhere. European soccer grosses almost twice as much as the NFL and college football together in the United States. One also sees the breadth of Europe’s dominance of sports at the Olympics.



Source: MedalTracker/New York Times

In the Summer Games, Europe takes home more medals than the United States, Russia, and China together; in the Winter Games, Europe has always won more medals than the entire rest of the world combined.

Why European power is crisis-proof



People wave EU and Polish flags during a demonstration in Warsaw to mark the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on March 25, 2017. (Photo credit: WOJTEK RADWANSKI/AFP/Getty Images)

The underlying determinants of global influence — military capabilities, nominal and per capita income, trade and investment competitiveness, the intrinsic attractiveness of symbolic ideas and institutions — are changing far more slowly than headlines suggest. Europe today is the world’s invisible superpower — rivaling and, in many cases, surpassing

the United States and China. It has the resources to retain this status for decades and generations to come.

Today formal and tacit cooperation among European states functions so reliably that only in the rare cases that it fails to occur does the wider world take note. Europe, like other superpowers, is often distracted by seemingly intractable internal disputes and crises. Today they include migration, right-wing radicalism, Brexit, Russian resurgence, and slow growth under the euro. Yet these threats to the European project are less dire than they appear at first glance.

Far-right parties are unlikely to triumph in any continental political system, let alone spark a mass withdrawal from the EU. In these political systems, government is by coalition and referendums are rare. In the Netherlands, euroskeptic parties are set to be excluded from government. In France, Marine Le Pen has little chance of prevailing in the decisive second round of the upcoming presidential election and her party sends only two representatives to the Assemblée Nationale. Euroskeptic parties rule Hungary and Poland, yet have shied away from the suicidal step of withdrawing from the EU.

British leaders resolutely claim to be moving forward with a “hard Brexit.” However, Prime Minister Theresa May’s public negotiating plan proposes to retain (under another name) almost all existing types of cooperation with the EU except future free movement of people. (External trade policy remains in limbo, perhaps as a bargaining chip.) One important example is NATO. Britain intends to maintain its defense alliances, so there is little reason to expect its active participation in military “coalitions of the willing” to change.

The migrant crisis is receding. EU and national policies have successfully reduced migration to a third of its 2015 peak. That would be impossible without leadership from Brussels, and a further round of common EU policies appears to be in the works. In Ukraine, where 10,000 people died in 18 months just a few years ago, a resolute Europe-led Western policy of aid, sanctions, military preparedness, and diplomatic engagement has helped reduce the death toll to a trickle.

Perhaps the most troubling future threat comes from slow growth and austerity within the eurozone. An EU without the euro as we currently know it might well be more popular and stable than it is today.

Perhaps the most troubling future threat comes from slow growth and austerity within the eurozone. An EU without the euro as we currently know it might well be more popular and stable than it is today. Yet even the euro appears stable for the moment, and growth rates are trending up. As with the other crises, Europe may well muddle through.

Whatever the outcome, these crises seem to have had surprisingly little impact on Europe’s status as a global superpower. Most of Europe’s core formal institutions — including the single market, environmental and other public regulation, the common trade policy, agricultural policy, foreign aid, common border controls — remain essentially untouched. They are not major targets of euroskeptic criticism. Other European superpower policies — including those in foreign, defense, anti-terrorism, anti-crime, foreign aid, sanctions,

diplomatic, and development policies — require only informal coordination, “coalitions of the willing,” or tacit cooperation. Recent sanctions on Russia and Iran show that European governments are acting decisively even when diverted by crisis. All these policies will endure whether or not European governments reform their economies, further centralize or decentralize policymaking, increase defense spending, or adopt any other of the various policy prescriptions floating around Europe.

We should not be distracted by sensationalist headlines. Sixty years ago, when European leaders met to sign the Treaty of Rome, one of their shared goals was to strengthen Europe’s global position. They have succeeded and, looking forward, there is little reason to doubt they will continue to do so.

Top photo credit: TOBIAS SCHWARZ/AFP/Getty Images

Andrew Moravcsik is professor of politics and director of the European Union Program at Princeton University.